

Connecting People with the Land

THROUGH THE BENEFITS OF LAND STEWARDSHIP
IN THE EASTERN REGION



THE EASTERN REGION'S RECREATION BLUEPRINT



U.S.D.A. FOREST SERVICE EASTERN REGION

The Eastern Region's recreation blueprint "Connecting People with the Land" is an internal working document, which captures the essence of the Eastern Region and defines recreation's role in connecting people to the land. The goals and benefits, aligned with national recreation emphasis areas will guide this region's programs. Subsequent documents, booklets, and brochures are intended to be built from this blueprint to provide implementation and communication strategies to achieve these regional goals.

Recreation as the Conduit to Connect People to the Land

The Eastern Region's effort, "Islands of Green in a Sea of People" describes the geographical situation of being almost exclusively the only federal land available in this 20-state region amidst a growing population, many who reside in metropolitan areas. Recognizing this situation, we are then ideally positioned to connect with the largest diverse public segment in the U.S. and share what the Forest Service and Eastern Region are all about. "Connecting People with the Land" recognizes this unique position in delivering public benefits from federal land stewardship and the role of recreation. Recreation is the key platform or conduit to reach the public through open dialogue concerning the benefits that each forest provides as part of their niche. Sharing and collaborating with the public about these benefits while assessing the forest's niche, revising a forest plan or planning recreation activities are all ways to seek understanding in meeting people's needs, both urban and rural, within the capabilities of the ecosystem.

The Eastern Region: Ideally Positioned to Connect People to the Land

The Eastern Region includes three major ecological Divisions and six ecological Provinces, creating a diversity of landscapes and environments that range from the headwaters of the Mississippi in the glaciated plains of Minnesota, to the Garden of the Gods within the rural farmlands of the Ohio River valley, to the Presidential mountain range in New Hampshire. The temperate climate gives rise to over 10,000 lakes and 15,000 miles of streams for premier water-based recreation. Average winter temperatures in the northern half of the Region remain below freezing while summers are mild, creating a snow-sport wonderland in the winter and the historic "north woods" summer vacation land to cities like Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, and Boston. The dense oak-hickory forests of the southern half of the region experience hot summers and cool winters. Surrounding farming and rural communities delight in the forested playground close to home, while urban populations traveling from Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Washington, D.C., retreat to the lush hardwoods of the Allegheny High Plateau and Appalachian Mountains, especially during the brilliance of the fall color season.

Serving almost half of the nation's population the national forests of the Eastern Region and the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie play a special role in the lives of people in the east and mid-western United States and are often the only large-scale areas of public land, available within a days drive. Forty-three percent of the nation's population resides within the Eastern Region. The long history of human occupation and "First Frontier" settlement of immigrants across the region is the nations best expression of historic and cultural diversity. The developed areas surrounding National Forests vary from densely populated rural, suburban, and even industrial areas, in the southern half of the region, to more widely scattered small towns

and private landholdings in the northern half. Within national forest boundaries, ownership is often mixed and interspersed. This social diversity and complexity garners working relationships with numerous and varied interests including a multitude of surrounding federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

Focusing on the Niche

As each forest and tallgrass prairie focuses on their niche to achieve the goals identified in “Connecting People with the Land”, efforts and investments, along with our partners, can be targeted on those settings and services we are best positioned to provide, especially in conservation education and interpretation. The outcomes of achieving these goals have profound benefits:

- stronger relationships built on people’s sense of connection to the national forests and tallgrass prairie so we can engage and collaborate together
- quality settings that people sense are indeed special
- partnerships that promote a sense of pride and ownership
- services that add a sense of value to these public lands
- conservation education and interpretation that instill a sense of awareness, appreciation and respect for the land and each other

Relationships

Goals:

Through collaboration, we engage both rural and urban communities in developing a shared vision of natural resource management that transgresses administrative boundaries; and defining the role and niche of each national forest and tallgrass prairie in providing public benefits.

Aligned with each forest’s niche and within ecological limits and budgetary constraints, we

contribute toward social and economic sustainability and toward the general public’s quality of life.

We strive to nurture and improve individual customer relationships and reach out to underserved communities. We forge unique partnerships and build relationships with a multitude of partners including federal, state, local, and tribal governments.

Benefits:

People in urban areas and the surrounding rural communities have a sense of connection to their national forests and Midewin Tallgrass Prairie, and become engaged in public land stewardship.

Settings

Goals:

As part of the forests’ niche, we identify, protect and manage special places. These special places include: state-listed and nationally designated sites. Such special places include blue ribbon trout streams, national scenic and historic trails, National Recreation Areas, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Register of Historic Places, Wildernesses. Other special places, also included in the forest niche, are those places that make us unique such as specially managed wildlife habitat, tall grass prairies and quality settings where people can connect with nature.

We conduct inventories and assessments of recreation settings and facilities to integrate with other efforts such as watershed assessments and forest planning processes to make better investment and management decisions.

We take a businesslike approach by focusing management efforts and funds on settings and facilities that enhance the unique aspects or niche of each forest. For example, we may explore opportunities to reduce or change the current infrastructure at low use recreation sites to better meet our niche; or move

economically viable facilities into private–public ventures; or concession permits to allow us to focus on other areas of our niche.

Benefits:

People realize that national forests and Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie have a very special “sense of place” because each forest’s niche provides: connections with natural resources through history and culture; facilities that are safe, accessible and well maintained; and settings that are managed for sustainable high quality recreation opportunities for year-round enjoyment.

Partnerships

Goals:

We reach out and work with a wide variety of partners, in both public and private sectors, to focus efforts on our niche and connect people with natural resources through history and culture.

We look for opportunities to work with partners to improve visitor information and services, provide conservation education and interpretation, and help maintain recreation facilities.

We leverage funds through partnerships, as well as grants and fee retention programs, to further enhance the forest’s niche.

Benefits:

Partners feel a sense of pride and ownership by providing improved customer service that better meets users needs.

Services

Goals:

We carefully assess, plan and manage the forest’s niche and recreation uses within social and ecological capacities. For example we proactively exchange information and ideas with other recreation entities, utilization of marketing studies, use of State

Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) data, research information, and other resources.

We collaborate with other recreation managers and specialists such as with State and Private Forestry, Forest Research, State and county agencies, convention visitor bureaus and many others to provide seamless and efficient delivery of information so that users find our service is customer-friendly, easier, and more convenient.

We continue to improve services through research by identifying and acting on information provided by market research such as Urban Connections and customer surveys like the Recreation Use Monitoring Survey.

We connect surrounding rural and especially urban populations, with the opportunities available in the Eastern Region.

Benefits:

Through services, people have an understanding of the value of national forests and associated public benefits.

Conservation Education and Interpretation

Goals:

We help connect people with natural resources through history and culture.

We emphasize, expand, and improve conservation education and interpretation opportunities for visitors, school children, urban populations, and traditionally underserved populations primarily through collaboration with partners such as federal and state agencies, school systems, and nonprofit organizations.

Benefits:

People have a sense of awareness of their connection to the land and develop an appreciation and respect for the environment; natural and heritage resources; and other people and cultures.